

Farm to School Act of 2023

Supporting Healthy Farms, Healthy Kids & Healthy Communities
Sponsored by Senator Sherrod Brown and Senator Susan Collins

BACKGROUND

In 2010, Congress provided \$5 million annually in mandatory funding for the farm to school competitive grant and technical assistance program. The USDA Farm to School Grant Program increases the use of and improves access to local foods in schools – thus boosting farm income and economic opportunities – while also fostering experiential food education for our nation's children.

PROGRAM IMPACTS

Since the program's inception in 2013, USDA has awarded over \$52 million through Farm to School Grants, funding a total of 719 projects across all 50 States, the District of Columbia, U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, and Puerto Rico, reaching almost 21 million students in 47,000 schools. Moreover, this grant program's impacts reach beyond the immediate grantees. Schools report purchasing \$1.26 billion in local food from farmers, ranchers, fishermen and food processors in School Year 2018-2019 ([USDA Farm to School Census 2019](#)). Every dollar spent on local food generates up to an additional \$2.16 in economic activity, indicating school districts' local food purchases can lead to over \$1 billion in local economic activity ([National Farm to School Network, Benefits of Farm to School Fact Sheet](#)). Nationwide, 42.8 million students are eating healthier because they're engaged in food and agriculture education ([USDA Farm to School Census 2019](#)).

WHY THIS IS NEEDED

The Patrick Leahy Farm to School Grant Program is one of the only dedicated sources of funding to meet the growing demand for farm to school activities. Ensuring expanded stable funding, as well as improving access for applicants, will build on the successful momentum of grant investments.

THE FARM TO SCHOOL ACT WILL ACCOMPLISH THE FOLLOWING GOALS:

EXPAND AND IMPROVE THE SUCCESSFUL FARM TO SCHOOL GRANT PROGRAM

- Increase mandatory funding from \$5m to \$15m annually
- Raise the grant cap to \$500,000 to support larger-scale regional or coordinating projects
- Better target funding to support Tribal projects, community need, and beginning/socially disadvantaged producers

REDUCE BARRIERS TO FARM TO SCHOOL GRANTS

- Reduce barriers to applying for Farm to School Grants by granting USDA the authority to modify or waive the current 25% non-federal matching requirement
- Grant Tribal organizations greater latitude in sources of matching funds
- Direct USDA to report on the barriers to accessing the Farm to School Grant Program

INCREASE THE PROGRAM'S BENEFIT TO PRODUCERS

- Direct USDA to report on the barriers for small, beginning, socially disadvantaged, and Tribal producers to accessing farm-to-school markets, such as regulatory compliance costs

WHAT IS FARM TO SCHOOL?

Farm to school is a commonsense approach to child nutrition that empowers children and their families to make informed food choices while strengthening the local economy and contributing to vibrant communities. Farm to school implementation differs by location but always includes one or more of the following:

- **Procurement:** Local foods are purchased, promoted and served in the cafeteria or classroom as a snack or taste-test.
- **Education:** Students participate in educational activities related to agriculture, food, health or nutrition.
- **School Gardens:** Students engage in hands-on learning through gardening.

BENEFITS: A WIN FOR EVERYONE

Farm to school activities provide benefits to students, parents, schools, communities and food producers, including:

- Increases market opportunities for small and diverse farmers, ranchers, fishers and local food producers and entrepreneurs.
- Increases children's consumption of fruits and vegetables.
- Supports equitable community and economic development.
- Strengthens knowledge and attitudes toward agriculture, food, nutrition and the environment.